

'Rock snot' spreading to streams in N.J.

Article from NJHerald.Com

Rock snot. Now that we've got your attention, please listen up and take heed of this invasive plant, which loves trout streams and is coming to a stream in New Jersey, if it isn't already here.

With the Latin name of *didymosphenia geminata*, the plant picked up the nickname of "didymo" among scientists, but, because of its appearance, got the moniker "rock snot" among those who have seen it.

Rock snot is an algae that forms massive mats in streams and, according to the DEP, arrived on the East Coast in 2007. While New Jersey DEP said sightings have been reported in New Jersey rivers, the department did not say which rivers.

The algae has been found in the Connecticut and White rivers and the Batten Kill in Vermont and in the tailwaters of the East Branch and West Branch and Mainstem of the Delaware River in New York. Trout fishermen in Virginia have reported the algae in some of their favorite streams.

Environmental officials in New England have described the plants' appearance as "the planet with the flu," and others have said it reminds them of a sewage plant overflow because, at some stages of its growth, the long tentacles turn white and give the appearance of toilet paper.

It appears to be spread by fishermen and boaters, especially those who use canoes, kayaks and small fishing boats.

While it forms in mats, rock snot is actually a single-cell algae. It is native to the alpine regions of Europe, Asia, and western North America, where it has caused problems with massive blooms in the western US for about a decade. There are no studies yet to show just what environmental damage the invasive plant can cause, but biologists in Vermont and New Hampshire said that such invasions usually aren't good for native plants, insects and fish.

Last summer, the plants made their appearance along the Vermont-New Hampshire border and in the Batten Kill, a very popular trout stream which flows from Vermont into New York where it meets the Hudson River.

While rock snot is generally drab in color and can be light gray, brown, white, or pale yellow. It first attaches itself to rocks or plants and, during blooms, it forms large mats which then develop long streamers which look similar to tissue paper.

Because the most likely way to spread the algae is by human contact, state DEP biologists are advising all fishermen and boaters to carefully clean their gear when they come out of any stream and before they enter another body of water.

In fact, in some New England states, fishermen are being asked not to use waders with felt soles. The felt can easily pick up the algae and, because the felt can stay damp for weeks, the plants can live until the waders go into water again.

The following steps are advised:

1. Remove any natural debris from your equipment before packing up and leave the debris on the shore at the site.
2. Soak and scrub nonporous items such as rubber waders and buckets for at least one minute.
3. Let porous items, such as felt-soled boots or clothing, soak for a minimum of 30 minutes.

The cleaning solution should be bleach and hot water, salt and hot water, or dish detergent and hot water. The hotter the water, the more effective the cleaning will be.

For those cleaning a boat at home, do not use a hose in a driveway to clean your equipment. The water could carry rock snot to a storm drain and then into a nearby stream.

If cleaning is not practical, dry or freeze the items completely, then let them set for at least an additional 48 hours.

Boating equipment should be broken down to its smallest components to be cleaned and allowed to dry.

Anyone who believes they have come across a colony of Rock Snot should contact the Department of Environmental Protection about the location.

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